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ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD STRATEGIES

Although ethnography has been around for a long time, particularly as practiced by cultural anthropologists, sociologists differ sharply on both the conceptual meaning of ethnography and its application. Researchers frequently use the term in seemingly different ways. Spradley (1979, p. 3), for example, explains that "ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand another way of life from the native point of view." Zigarmi and Zigarmi (1980) refer to ethnographers as virtually anyone who enters the natural setting in order to conduct *field research*, a concept that itself suffers from confused understanding (see Guy et al., 1987). Some researchers, for example, Ellen (1984) and Stoddart (1986), suggest that ethnography involves the end product of field research, namely, the written account of observations. Other authorities, Preble and Casey (1969), Agar (1973), Weppner (1977), and Johnson et al. (1985), for instance, describe ethnography as an extremely effective method for studying illicit drug use and users. In an attempt to differentiate this style of research from anthropological ethnography, many drug researchers have called it *street ethnography* or *urban ethnography*. Leininger (1985, p. 33) coined the term *ethnonursing* to describe ethnography conducted by nurses; whereas Roper and Shapira (2000) and LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2002) refer to this activity as medical ethnographies. Lofland (1996, p. 30) describes the strategy of analytic ethnography as:

I use the term "analytic ethnography" to refer to research processes and products in which, to a greater or lesser degree, an investigator (a) attempts to provide generic propositional answers to questions about social life and organization; (b) strives to pursue such an attempt in a spirit of unfettered or naturalistic inquiry; (c) utilizes data based on deep familiarity with a social setting or situation that is gained by personal participation or an approximation of it; (d) develops the generic propositional analysis over the course of doing research; (e) strives to present data and analyses that are true; (f) seeks to provide data and/or analyses that are new; and (g) presents an analysis that is developed in the senses of being conceptually elaborated, descriptively detailed, and concept-

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broad

However, the various ways researchers speak about ethnography may amount little more than terminological preferences. Agar (1986) came to this conclusion in his examination of the language differences among various ethnographers and ethnographic traditions in his book *Speaking of Ethnography*.

Nonetheless, the important point about the concept of ethnography, regardless of one's language and terminological preference, is that the practice places researchers in the midst of whatever it is they study. From this vantage, researchers can examine various phenomena as perceived by participants and present these observations as accounts.

Wolcott (1984 [1973], 1999) captures the essence of most of these variations by defining ethnography as the *science of cultural description*. Clearly, ethnography is primarily a process that attempts to describe and interpret social expressions between people and groups. Or, as Geertz (1973) suggests, the researcher's task is to convey *thick description*, such that a wink can be distinguished from a twitch, and a parody of a wink is distinguishable from an actual wink (see Wilcox, 1988, p. 458).

Some researchers, Ellen (1984, 1987), for example, describe the ethnographic process as *subjective soaking*. According to Ellen (1984, p. 77), this occurs when the researcher "abandons the idea of absolute objectivity or scientific neutrality and attempts to merge him/herself into the culture being studied." Other subjectivist and existential approaches have given rise to the notion of fieldwork as *transition*, in which cultural elements including human ideas and perceptions are considered *opaque texts*. From this vantage, the primary objective of ethnography is to read the text. The text, however, should be considered the literal textual context of the ethnographer's notebooks, memos, and the like. This orientation toward ethnography, then, can be understood as the product of interaction between the observer and the observed (Lifford, 1980). Along similar lines, some researchers seek to understand the worldviews of native inhabitants of social environments or what may be called the *emic view*. This emic or insider's view of the world can be contrasted with the *etic view* or outsider's worldview (Creswell, 1999; LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2002; Tedlock, 2000).

The more traditional anthropological approach of ethnography, as represented by the works of Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Boas, has been primarily concerned with this type of subjectivist translation. During the past 50 years, however, anthropological methods, like other sociological ones, have undergone considerable advancement, refinement, and change (see, for example, Adler & Adler, 1987; Tewksbury, 2001). Ellen (1984) and Agar (1996) both point out that these changes have produced no less than a quiet revolution, resulting in a *new ethnography*.

The field of the new ethnography, as suggested in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, has experienced considerable confusion, both conceptually and methodologically. One major result of adaptation to the new ethnography has been a redefining of *ethnography* as a set of highly formal

techniques designed to extract cognitive data (Ellen, 1984; Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1982). Another consequence of this quiet revolution is what Spindler (1988) describes as the meteoric rise of *educational ethnography* during the past decade, particularly the past several years. As Spindler (1988, p. 1) explains: "Ethnography has become virtually a household word in professional education, and it is the rare research project today that does not have somewhere in the table of operations at least one ethnographer and somewhere in the research design some ethnographic procedures."

During the past 25 years, this new ethnography has grown popular among nursing researchers (see, for example, Leininger & McFarland, 2002; Morse & Field, 1995). Frequently, one finds this technique referred to as *ethnonursing research* (Burns & Grove, 2000; Leininger, 2002; Polit & Hungler, 1995), which means conducting a study and analysis of some local or indigenous people's viewpoints, beliefs, and practices (the emic view) about nursing care behavior and processes as mediated by cultures. For example, in a recent study by Jennifer Fenwick, Lesley Barclay, and Virginia Schmied (1999) they examined the context and nature of the interactions between health professionals and parents in two Australian level II nurseries. They found that, although the presence of mothers in the nursery was high, registered nurses remained the primary caretakers of the infants.

In the foreword to Ferrell and Hamm's (1998) recent work on ethnographies on crime and deviance, Patricia and Peter Adler characterize the evolutionary development of fieldwork as marked by an early (1920s) period of *impressionism* that emerged early in the Chicago school of urban research. Next came a period of *renaissance* (1946–1955), marked by a second generation of Chicago school researchers. This was followed by *abstract expressionism* during the 1960s and a shift of the ethnographic enterprise's sociological center to California, where focus was placed on deviant, alternative, counter-cultural, and illegal groups. Then came the *dark ages*, beginning in the late 1970s but not entirely full-blown until the 1990s. These were the years that institutional review boards (IRBs) placed strangleholds on many ethnographic research endeavors. Today, we have reached a period of *enlightenment*, a time when brave ethnographers are moving research into a new millennium. Currently, ethnography is experiencing a renewed interest and considerable healthy vigor.

The principal concern in this chapter is to examine the new ethnography as an extremely effective research strategy. Van Maanen (1982, p. 103) suggests that ethnography has become the method "that involves extensive fieldwork of various types including participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, document collecting, filming, recording, and so on." It is not, however, the intent of this chapter to diminish the significant contribution made by the more traditional (textual) orientation. In fact, a section of this chapter on ethnography as a narrative style discusses the more traditional ethnographic orientation.

One other significant aspect of ethnography is the distinction sometimes made between *micro-* and *macroethnography* (sometimes referred to as *general ethnography*). One obvious difference is the scope of a given investigation. Macroethnography attempts to describe the entire way of life of a group. In contrast, microethnography focuses on particular *incisions* at particular points in the larger setting, group, or institution. Typically, these specific points are selected because they in some manner represent salient elements in the lives of participants and in turn, in the life of the larger group or institution.

A second fundamental difference between micro- and macroethnography is that the former analytically focuses more directly on the face-to-face interactions of members of the group or institution under investigation. By examining these interactions, their implications (or as Mehan [1978] suggests, *their outcomes*) can be considered. For example, Wolcott's (1973) *The Man in the Principal's Office* was intended to offer an accurate description of the real world of one elementary school principal and, by extension, to identify the various behaviors, attitudes, and processes shared by other elementary school principals.

In spite of various differences, both micro- and macroethnography share an overarching concern for assessing everyday community life from the perspectives of participants. From detailed examinations of people and their social course and the various outcomes of their actions, underlying principles and concepts can be identified. As a result, neither micro- nor macroethnography is fully understandable individually without some consideration of the other. For example, it would be impossible to understand the concept of classroom management in relation to the concept of learning without some consideration of how this relates to learning environments in general (see Allen, 1986).

This chapter is divided into five sections: Accessing a Field Setting: Getting In; Becoming Invisible; Other Dangers During Ethnographic Research; Teaching, Listening, and Learning; and Disengaging: Getting Out.

ACCESSING A FIELD SETTING: GETTING IN

Shaffir et al. (1980) and Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) suggest, one central problem shared by all field investigators is the problem of *getting in*. This particular problem begins at the design stage. It involves consideration of who the subjects are and the nature of the setting. For example, Spencer (1991) describes the problems he and others have had trying to study certain bureaucratic institutions such as the military. Spencer (1991) outlines the mechanisms such institutions possess for avoiding or controlling access to research data. Even when a researcher is given permission to conduct a study in an institution such as a prison, a mental hospital, or as Spencer (1991) did at the U.S. Military Academy, where a researcher can go and with whom a researcher may speak may be controlled.

Robert Burgess (1991b, p. 43) suggests that access is "negotiated and renegotiated throughout the research process." He further states that "access is based on sets of relationships between the researcher and the researched, established throughout a project."

Roger Vallance (2001) has a slightly different take on the matter. Vallance suggests that access should be sought through introduction and referrals. According to Vallance (2001, p. 68):

The essence of my contention can be summed up in the oft-quoted saying; *it is not what you know, but who(m) you know*. In a sense, this is analogous to snowballing: using one research participant to indicate others who can be equally or more informative. . . . Instead of using contacts to widen the sample as in snowball sampling, the suggestion here is to use one's contacts and relationships to gain the vital, initial entry into the field, where one can engage with possible research participants.

In an ideal situation, Vallance's suggestion is probably well taken—assuming the investigator is undertaking research in an area or on a topic in which he or she knows many people actively engaged in related work or activities. However, in many instances, researchers conduct studies in areas in which they simply do not know anyone who can serve as the kind of entrance guide or core to a *snowball* sample to be rolled through the project. For example, although a number of researchers have investigated burglary, few (if any) have themselves known active burglars prior to beginning their research (see, for example, Cromwell & Nielsen, 1999).

Hertz and Imber (1993) similarly detail the problems associated with conducting field studies in *elite settings*. As they suggest, there are very few studies of elites because elites are by their very nature difficult to penetrate. Unlike some other segments of society, elites often are visible and fairly easy to locate. Yet, because they are able to establish barriers and obstacles and because they can successfully refuse access to researchers, many elites are difficult to study.

Richard Tewksbury (2002) offers an interesting twist on an orientation originally offered by Joseph Styles (1979). Styles (1979, p. 151) refers to an *outsider* strategy of observation, which is not fully participatory but which allows the researcher to appear available to participate. Tewksbury (2002) uses this approach to gain access to a gay bathhouse (a locale where men go seeking to have sex with other men). As Tewksbury explains it, the researcher's role becomes one of a *potential participant* in the various activities of the natural setting. Tewksbury (2001, p. 6) explains this potential participant role as follows:

[It] combines aspects of complete observation, complete participation and covert observational research designs. Whereas the researcher adopting a potential participant role seeks to appear to those being researched as a "real" setting member

the "science" activities are conducted in covert manners. To anyone noticing the potential participant, the researcher is a real member of the setting being studied. To the scientific community, the potential participant is a complete observer, acting in a covert manner *inside* the research environment.

Using this strategy, Tewksbury was able to enter the bathhouse, spend several hours circulating there, and chat freely among the patrons while conducting observations of their activities, movements, interactions, and use of physical features in the facility (Tewksbury, 2002).

How might you gain access to difficult-to-reach groups? As simplistic it may seem, the answer lies in reading the literature. While various settings and groups are *difficult* to access, most are not impossible. Ostrander (1993) says she found it rather simple to gain access to upper-class women. She further suggests that sometimes a bit of luck, taking advantage of certain relationships, considerable background work, and making the right contacts frequently ease access to restricted groups. Although researching restricted settings or groups may involve more work initially, the rewards can be quite gratifying.

It is also important during the design stage of your research to consider several other important points. For example, because most ethnographic research involves human subjects, researchers must give considerable thought to ways they can protect the subjects from harm and injury. This is especially true when dealing with restricted groups or settings. You must be mindful not to bar future researchers' access by careless protection of subjects' rights and privacy. In addition, researchers must consider how they will go about gaining permission or consent of the subjects. Of course, this itself requires a decision about whether to enter the field as an announced researcher (overtly) or as a secret researcher (covertly).

Most sources on gaining access to the field agree on one thing: Whether the setting is a highly accessible or a very restricted setting, decisions made during the early stages of research are critical. This is true because such decisions will lay the conceptual and methodological foundation for the entire project. This can be likened to what Janesick (1994, pp. 210–211) describes as choreographing the research design. In other words, just as an expressive dancer might ask, "What statement do I want to say through my dance?" an ethnographer must consider the question, "What do I want to learn from this study?"

Toward this end, the decision to enter the field overtly or covertly as an investigator is important. Each style of entrance encompasses certain problems, and regardless of the style you choose, you must address these problems.

Similarly, with either style of entrance, researchers must consider that their very presence in the study setting may taint anything that happens among other participants in that setting. As Denzin (1970, pp. 203–204) suggests: "Reactive effects of observation are the most perplexing feature of participant observation, since the presence of an observer in any setting is often

a 'foreign object.' The creation of the role of participant observer inevitably introduces some degree of reactivity into the field setting."

Spindler and Spindler (1988, p. 25) similarly express their concerns about intruding by participating in the "life of the school" during their research. As a partial solution, they strive to "melt" into the classroom as much as possible. This attempt to "become invisible" will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

An argument can be made for both covert and overt stances when conducting ethnographic research. For instance, a study on casual homosexual encounters such as Humphreys's *Tearoom Trade* (1975) simply could not have been undertaken if he had formally announced his identity as a researcher. Briefly, Humphreys found a public bathroom where men met for brief homosexual encounters. Standing as lookout and assumed to be a voyeur or "watch queen," Humphreys managed to learn that many of these men had wives and families. They lived heterosexual lives but occasionally had homosexual encounters. His research demonstrated rather clearly that homosexuality was not a disease, as many people had previously believed, but a life style.

Similarly, in studies about people who frequent so-called adult movie theaters and book stores, the identification of an observing ethnographer might result in little information about such persons. It is also likely that such an announcement would create uncontrollable reactivity to the presence of the researcher. For example, nurses conducting ethnographic research with the intention of investigating drug theft practices of hospital staff members might create conflicts between themselves and others on the staff. Thus, a major argument for covert ethnographic research is the sensitivity of certain topics that might make it impossible to do research by other means. Naturally, in making such a case, you must additionally justify the undertaking of such research by some actual social or scientific benefit.

Scientific benefits notwithstanding, some serious ethical questions arise when covert research is conducted on human subjects. Among other concerns is the possibility that this type of research might abuse the rights and privacy of the research subjects, thereby causing them harm. For many scholars, there can be *no* justification for knowingly harming subjects.

On the other hand, entering an ethnographic study as a known researcher has several benefits. For example, in his study of medical students, Becker (1963) noted that his status as an identified researcher allowed him to ask questions of various hospital personnel more effectively. Similarly, Berg et al. (1983), in a study of adolescent involvement in alcohol, drugs, and crime, suggest that by having entered the field overtly, they succeeded in locating guides and informants (discussed in detail later). Many of these adolescents might otherwise have thought the two field ethnographers were narcs—people who are or work for the police. By having established who they were and what they were doing in the field, the two ethnographers managed to gain considerable rapport with their subjects.

Because of the ethical concerns associated with the overt/covert controversy and in light of heightened concern over falsification of research findings in scientific communities, this chapter primarily considers *getting in* as an overt activity. Issues commonly associated with determining a balance between covert and overt research techniques were more comprehensively considered in Chapter 3.

REFLECTIVITY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Access and ethical concerns underscore that ethnography requires a reflective concern on the part of the researcher, or what some scholars refer to as *reflexivity* (Boyle, 1994, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This reflexive characteristic implies that the researcher understands that he or she is part of the social world(s) that he or she investigates. Ethnography involves activities that fall somewhere between rigorous, dare I say, positivist approaches and more naturalistic reflections of the actual social worlds of the people being studied. Good ethnography requires that the researcher avoids simply accepting everything at face value but, instead, considers the material as raw data that may require corroboration or verification.

Ethnography, then, becomes a process of gathering systematic observations, partly through participation and partly through various types of conversational interviews (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Yet, it may additionally require the use of photography, computers, mapping, archival searches, and even assorted documents. Ethnographers today must do more than simply describe the populations they investigate; they must strive to understand them and, if possible, to explain their activities.

Reflexivity further implies a shift in the way we understand data and their collection. To accomplish this, the researcher must make use of an internal dialogue that repeatedly examines *what the researcher knows and how the researcher came to know this*. To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation with yourself. The reflexive ethnographer does not merely report findings as facts but actively constructs interpretations of experiences in the field and then questions how these interpretations actually arose (Hertz, 1997; Van Maanen, 1988). The ideal result from this process is reflexive knowledge: information that provides insights into the workings of the world and insights on how that knowledge came to be.

The Attitude of the Ethnographer

The researcher's frame of mind when entering a natural setting is crucial to the eventual results of a study. If you strike the wrong attitude, you might well destroy the possibility of ever learning about the observed participants and their perceptions. Matza (1969) similarly identifies researcher attitude as

a crucial element in field studies. According to Matza (1969), one must enter *appreciating the situations rather than intending to correct them*. This sort of neutral posture allows researchers to understand what is going on around them rather than become either advocates or critics of the events they witness. In addition, appreciation does not require the interviewers to agree with or even to accept the perceptions of their subjects but merely to offer empathy.

Although many students might think it is unnecessary to suggest that ethnographers should conduct research with an appreciative attitude, in actuality it is an important recommendation.

The Researcher's Voice

Many researchers—both quantitative and qualitative alike—recommend that social science research maintain a *value neutral position*. From this perspective, social scientists are expected to study the world around them as external investigators. This means neither imposing their own views or taking any stands on social or political issues. This style of research tends to lend itself to a fairly positivist approach. During the more recent past, a number of social researchers have argued against this façade of value neutrality. Among the more vocal have been feminist researchers (Hertz, 1997; Reinharz, 1992; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Feminists have worked out a research orientation that is comfortable for both the researcher and the subjects. It tends to involve strategies that listen more and talk less, that humanize the research process, and that insist that the ethnographic researcher become both involved with his or her subjects and reflexive about his or her own thoughts. Some recent researchers have also sought to encourage the writing of self-reflective or *auto-ethnographies*, similar in concept to more traditional autobiographies (Ellis & Bochner, 1996).

Objectively, social scientists should recognize that research is seldom, if ever, really value neutral. After all, the selection of a research topic typically derives from some researcher-oriented position. As previously implied in this chapter, topic selection occurs because of an interest in the subject matter, or because it is a politically advantageous area to receive grant monies, because of some inner humanistic drive toward some social problem, or because one has personal experiences or what Lofland (1996, p. 44) calls "deep familiarity" with the subject area. The fact is, research is seldom undertaken for a neutral reason. Furthermore, all humans residing in and among social groups are the product of those social groups. This means that various values, moral attitudes, and beliefs orient people in a particular manner.

For instance, a person's selection of certain terms indicates the kind of influences that a person's social groups have on him or her. During the early 1980s, I thought nothing of using the pronoun *he* consistently and exclusively in my writing. Similarly I often used the words *policeman*, *chairman*, *postman*,

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and similar types of terms. By the mid-1980s, however, with the press for political correctness, my orientation changed and I began using the convention of writing *he* or *she* and using terms such as *police officer*, *chair*, and *postal worker*. The point here is that my basic orientations were affected, not merely my semantics. How I viewed social worlds was now different, and it is such differences that affect the possibility of value neutrality in research.

More recently, and again following from feminist researchers' lead, my writing has begun to incorporate the use of first person singular. In other words, I use the word *I*. Particularly when writing ethnographic reports, it began to be apparent that using the first person singular was more direct. Rather than saying, "The researcher began to recognize blah, blah, blah . . ." it seemed more forthright to simply say, "I began to recognize. . . ." In this manner, a researcher can take both ownership and responsibility for what is being stated. Furthermore, one's writing style becomes far less cumbersome and often eliminates passive and convoluted sentences.

Along similar lines, the use of personal biography or deep familiarity with a subject has become more common and accepted by ethnographers. One excellent example is Phil Brown's exploration of the culture of the Catskill Mountains' resorts (Brown, 1996). The "Borscht Belt," as the area is known, is where mainly metropolitan Jews fled New York and New Jersey for a summer retreat (Brown, 1996). On the other side of the coin, it was a place where young, often Jewish, college students went to work in order to earn their way through school. A number of well-known and large hotels, bungalow colonies, and camps grew up during the 1940s, and the largely Jewish resort area flourished until about the 1970s. Brown (1996, p. 84) writes from the perspective of an observer who grew up in the Catskill culture and from the orientation of first-person deep familiarity:

I grew up in a family of "mountain rats," a Catskill term for those who lived and worked in "the Mountains" over many years. My parents began in 1948 as owners of a small hotel, Brown's Hotel Royal, on White Lake. . . . In 1948 the chef quit at the start of the season. Unable to find a replacement, my mother, Sylvia Brown, gave herself a crash course in cooking and never left the kitchen again. After our hotel went broke two years later, she spent the rest of her working years as a chef.

Maintaining the facade of neutrality prevents a researcher from ever examining his or her own cultural assumptions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) or personal experiences. Subjective disclosures by researchers allow the reader to better understand why a research area has been selected, how it was studied, and by whom. If a nurse studies cancer patients and explains that his or her selection of this topic resulted after a family member contracted the disease, this does not diminish the quality of the research. It does, however, offer a keener insight about who is doing the research and why. It may even provide

the reader with greater understanding about why certain types of questions were investigated, while others were not.

Similarly, when a researcher reveals that he or she was tempted to, or did, intervene in the lives of his or her subjects, the reader gets a different image of both the researcher and the research. It is likely that anyone who has ever undertaken drug research among children, at the very least, has been tempted to try to convince some child that using heroin or crack cocaine is not a good thing to do. From a strictly positivist value neutral position, of course, one cannot do this. This activity is the work of social workers and not social scientists. From a softer, more humane perspective, however, it seems a reasonable activity along with the fieldwork. Having the researcher reveal that he or she did try to intervene or even the inner battle the researcher may have had resisting intervening are important pieces of information. This information allows the reader to better understand the true face of both the researcher and the study results.

Finally, presenting subjective disclosures, or giving voice to the researcher, provides insights into the world of research for the reader. Rather than merely heaping results, findings, and even analysis upon the reader, the researcher can share a small portion of the research experience.

Subjective Motivational Factors. Frequently, qualitative studies report in considerable detail the autobiographical motivations that led investigators to conduct their research as they did. These sorts of "true confessions," as Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) call them, are apparently designed to describe the initial biases, values, and theoretical orientations that eventually produced the project. As Johnson (1975) suggests, some researchers may have been motivated or inspired to conduct research in the hopes that such a project would offer positive steps toward realizing some abstract ideal (for example, advancing scientific knowledge, alleviating human misery, resolving some specific social problem, and so on).

External Motivating Factors. Conversely, Punch (1986, p. 210) suggests that the gamut of possible personal motivational factors that leads investigators to conduct research of one type or another may not result from high ideals at all. A number of features—not articulated in the researcher's confessions—may have been critically influential in the decision to study a given phenomenon or to do so in a particular manner. Certainly, the personality of the researcher may have an effect. Not all investigators are willing to associate with certain types of deviants or enter into some specialized natural settings (for example, investigating inmates in correctional institutions or drug addicts in the South Bronx).

Another simple factor, seldom discussed in detail yet perhaps responsible for much research, is geographic proximity and access opportunities. The Adlers (Adler 1985) for example indirectly explain that their study on drug

dealers and smugglers arose almost serendipitously. After moving to California to attend graduate school and renting a condominium townhouse on the beach, they met a neighbor identified as Dave. Later, the Adlers learned that Dave was a member of a smuggling crew that imported "a ton of marijuana weekly and 40 kilos of cocaine every few months" (Adler, 1985, p. 14). The friendship that developed between Dave and the Adlers provided access to the world of high-level drug dealers and smugglers.

In a similar manner, Peshkin (1986) reports that he began his study of a fundamentalist Christian school largely as a matter of circumstance. As Peshkin (1986, p. 11) describes it:

By means of an event which my Christian friends would call providential, and everyone else I know would call coincidental, I came to my present study. The event: a midwinter blizzard, an evening class, and a student in need of a ride home. The student was the Reverend David Householder, whose son attended a local Christian school and who assured me, when I expressed a fascination with religious schools, that he would help in every way he could to arrange for me to study his son's school.

Certainly, there is something romantic and exciting about the image of an ethnographer spending time with potentially dangerous people in interesting, albeit grimy, bars, gambling houses, various hidden erotic worlds (see, for example, Ferrell & Hamm, 1998; Lee, 2001; Tewksbury, 1995). Ethnography can be, as Lofland and Lofland (1984) describe it, an "adventure." Yet, it is also rigorous, time-consuming, and often boring, tedious work.

Many researchers study certain settings simply because of their convenience or special ease of accessibility. Later, they endeavor to justify their choice on the basis of some grand ideal or spurious theoretical grounds (Punch, 1986). Yet what these researchers apparently fail to recognize is that everyday realities are heavily influenced by human feelings, and presentation of these feelings is legitimate!

The omission of the ethnographers' feelings for and about their research inevitably creates what Johnson (1975, p. 145) describes as "the fieldworker as an iron-willed, steel-nerved, cunning Machiavellian manipulator of the symbolic tools of everyday discourse." Including some indication of why researchers have undertaken a particular project along with the methodological procedure provides a means for making the research come alive, to become interesting to the reading audience. When research is interesting, as Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 127) indicate, it is not only instrumental but may be expressively aesthetic. In consequence, researchers may produce what Stinchcombe (1975, p. 32) expresses as "the experience [of] a thrill at a beautiful idea."

Unfortunately, in their attempt to objectify their research efforts, many investigators ignore, omit, or conceal their feelings since such emotions are not typically considered capable of independent verification by others. Yet it

is important to remember that overrationalized, highly objectified, nearly sterile methodological accounts of fieldwork efforts are not complete descriptions of the research enterprise. Mentions of researchers' personal feelings are not wholly absent from the research literature, but they are relatively rare and are frequently made anecdotally rather than with a substantive purpose in mind (Johnson, 1975).

Gaining Entry

Accounts of how ethnographers gained entry to research settings vary from situation to situation. Researchers need to remain flexible concerning entry tactics and strategies (Shaffir et al., 1980), yet they also need to plan these strategies and tactics in advance—in short, to be prepared!

Ethnographers can borrow Schatzman and Strauss's (1973) general recommendation to field-workers to use a *casing and approaching* style. In addition to considering the suitability of the chosen setting and its appropriateness for the study's research goals, ethnographers must consider their strategies for and their feelings about operating in that setting. This aspect of the process includes determining how much they already know about the people in the setting and how much more they will need to learn in order to operate effectively. Johnson (1975) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) similarly stress paying special attention to preparations before entering the research setting.

Knowledge about the people being studied and familiarity with their routines and rituals facilitate entry as well as rapport once entry has been gained. For example, Philips (1972, 1975) investigated the cultural organization of social relationships in classrooms and homes on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. Eventually, Philips found that differences did exist between behaviors of Native American and non-Native American adults. These behavioral differences were found to depend largely on the setting—the home (a private setting) or the classroom (a public setting). However, in order to appreciate what this meant, Philips had to learn about the Warm Springs Native American culture.

Timothy McGettigan (2001) describes his experience and expectations about gaining entry for his study of the Green Tortoise (a young adult adventure bus). McGettigan (2001, par. 3.2) explains:

One of the unique features of the Green Tortoise is that "getting in," or what Wax (1971) refers to as "the first and most uncomfortable stage of fieldwork," is equally difficult for all. Field researchers often study well-established groups, and, prior to initiation, they can appear hopelessly inept. . . . However, on the Tortoise there was no pre-established community. Instead, all of the passengers were cast into the role of bungling outsiders.

In fact, developing a cohesive in-group is one of the principal features of Tortoise journeys. Adventure travel on the Tortoise is predicated upon cramming

overbooked passengers onto old, refurbished buses and taking them on long trips without precise itineraries. Because the buses are usually very crowded (e.g., there were forty-two people on this journey), passengers are forced to violate many of the niceties of conventional crowd behavior. Sean, a German man on his sixth adventure trip, noted that a common saying on the Green Tortoise is "Move your meat, lose your seat." Nevertheless, I was alarmed throughout the first few days because of how often I bumped into others and invaded their space—no matter how ill-defined.

In spite of various ethnographers' personal accounts, as a starting point it is wise, especially for the beginning researcher, to begin in the library and to locate as much information about the group as possible before attempting entry. You might also begin, as Vallance (2001) suggests, by considering your friends and social networks to see if anyone you know can offer a *referral* into the group you intend to study. But in many instances the library will be your best resource. Even when there is little literature on a specific topic, there is often considerable work on some related area.

Developing Research Bargains. Gaining entry into various settings also is affected by the kinds of arrangements or *bargains* made between researchers and subjects. Many researchers' accounts about how they gained entry to their research settings include descriptions of negotiating access with a highly visible and respected individual who held a position of rank, authority, or respect among others in the group (Calhoun, 1992; Guy et al., 1987; Haas & Shaffir, 1978; Leinen, 1993; Whyte, 1955). During recent years, there has also been an increased interest by researchers to create *research teams* that include, as members, *insiders* from the group or groups to be studied (see, for example, Jones, 1995; Tewksbury, 1997).

Gatekeepers. Gatekeepers can be critical in terms of accessing a research setting or reaching research subjects. These gatekeepers may be formal or informal watchdogs who protect the setting, people, or institutions sought as a target for research. Often these individuals hold pivotal positions in the hierarchy of the group or institution sought for study—although they may not be high up the hierarchical rankings. For example, secretaries are typically key gatekeepers in institutions. They can make a researcher's life easy or very difficult. Yet, the social status of a secretary in the institution is likely not as high as the individual for whom he or she works. Gaining access may require some sort of mediation with these individuals, and research bargains may necessarily be struck. Once a gatekeeper sees the research favorably, he or she may be willing to go to bat for the researcher, should obstacles arise during the course of the study. Conversely, if the gatekeeper disapproves of the project or is in some manner bypassed, he or she may become an unmovable obstacle.

When explaining your research project or procedures to gatekeepers, you must be cautious. Experienced researchers usually will recommend being

honest but not too detailed in any explanation offered (see, for example, Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Sometimes, if people feel you are going to be observing people or settings too closely, they become overly protective and sensitive. A general description of the research purpose will usually suffice. Human nature being what it is, frequently, gatekeepers are mainly seeking acknowledgment from the researcher that they hold the keys to the setting. It is generally a good idea, however, to think about what possible objections a gatekeeper might have to your conducting the research and to have alternative responses to possible problems.

In order to ensure that all information collected during the study will be held strictly private and confidential, it is advisable to offer a brief description of the precautions planned to ensure confidentiality.

Guides and Informants. One way to handle initial relationships is to locate *guides* and *informants*. Guides are indigenous persons found among the group and in the setting to be studied. These persons must be convinced that the ethnographers are who they claim to be and that the study is worthwhile. The worth of the study must be understood and be meaningful to the guides and their group. Similarly, these guides must be convinced that no harm will befall them or other members of the group as a result of the ethnographers' presence. The reason for these assurances, of course, is so the guide can reassure others in the group that the ethnographers are safe to have around.

Horowitz (1983, p. 6), who describes herself as a "Jewish, educated, small, fairly dark woman," obviously needed a guide when she studied a Chicano neighborhood. She describes her initial encounter with the Lions (a Chicano gang) and the fortuitous identification of a guide (Horowitz, 1983, p. 7):

I chose to sit on a bench in a park where many youths gathered from noon until midnight. On the third afternoon of sitting on the bench, as I dropped a softball that had rolled toward me, a young man came over and said, "You can't catch" (which I acknowledged) and "you're not from the hood [neighborhood], are you?" This was a statement, not a question. He was Gilberto, the Lions' president. When I told him I wanted to write a book on Chicano youth, he said I should meet the other young men and took me over to shake hands with eight members of the Lions.

Sometimes persons who are willing to be guides or informants turn out to be restricted in their groups. Perhaps they are resented or disliked by others in the group. Consequently, several guides and the snowballing of guides and informants may assist ethnographers in their maneuverability while in the field. *Snowballing*, in the sense it is being used here, refers to using people whom the original guide(s) introduces to the ethnographer as persons who can also vouch for the legitimacy and safety of the researcher.

The larger the ethnographers' network of reliable guides and informants, the greater their access and ability to gain further cooperation. Eventually, the

need for specific guides decreases as subject networks grow in size, and the ethnographers are able to begin casual acquaintanceships by virtue of their generally accepted presence on the scene. This will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter, *Becoming Invisible*.

Peshkin (1988, p. 51) describes how he and his research team developed their network of guides for his previously mentioned "Mansfield" study by building on the initial guide, Mr. Tate:

I joined him [Mr. Tate] at church and at the Kiwanis meetings. By attending all local football games, other social events, and as many community activities as I thought would welcome me, I meant to become visible and known, and thereby to facilitate my access to other activities and many people I planned to interview.

The preceding guidelines and illustrations suggest some broad considerations and tactics ethnographers may use in order to gain entry to a specific setting. Similar accounts of entry may be found throughout the literature on ethnography and field research. However, some accounts also suggest that entry is determined by the innate abilities and personalities of the ethnographers. This attitude is comparable to the notion that only certain innately gifted people can conduct effective in-depth interviews—and it is likewise inaccurate (see Chapter 4 for a comprehensive examination of this argument regarding interviewing). A more accurate description of the effects of persona may be effects from the type of role and personality an ethnographer projects. In other words, just as the characterizations and social roles played out by the interviewer affect the quality of the interview performance, so too do these activities affect the ethnographer's performance.

Naturally, indigenous ethnographers—persons who already are members of the group to be studied—possess certain strategic advantages, but as several nurses who conduct ethnography have suggested, neither their indigenous status nor special knowledge about the health care profession made conducting their research any easier (Ostrander, 1993; Peterson, 1985; Quint, 1967).

In some instances, researchers may be able to gain entry more quickly because of their indigenous status. Unfortunately, this is sometimes mistaken for an innate ability (Hoffmann, 1980). Certainly, a clumsy ethnographer, regardless of personal contacts, will produce flawed ethnographies.

BECOMING INVISIBLE

As mentioned previously, one obstacle to conducting ethnographic research is the very presence of the ethnographer in the field. Early in the history of field research, Roethlisberger and Dickenson (1939) identified a phenomenon now commonly called the *Hawthorne effect*. Briefly, the Hawthorne effect sug-

gests that when subjects know they are subjects in a research study, they will alter their usual (routine) behavior. Fortunately, this effect is typically short-lived, and the behavior of subjects eventually returns to a more routine style. But the persistent presence of ethnographers in a social setting might certainly reactivate the Hawthorne effect in varying degrees every time someone new is introduced to the researchers. Ethnographic accounts, therefore, understandably offer readers explanations of how the ethnographers' presence was made *invisible* to the subjects.

The status as an *invisible researcher*, as Stoddart (1986) describes it, is the ability to be present in the setting, to see what's going on without being observed, and consequently, to capture the essence of the setting and participants without influencing them. Stoddart (1986, pp. 109–113) identifies six possible variations on this theme of invisible status:

1. *Disattending: Erosion of visibility by time.* When the ethnographers have been present in a domain for a long time, the inhabitants tend not to be aware of them anymore. The notice inhabitants initially took of them has eroded or worn off.

2. *Disattending: Erosion of visibility by display of no symbolic detachment.* The second variation on the theme differs slightly from the first. In this instance, a specific condition believed to facilitate ethnographer invisibility is offered—namely, the assertion that displaying no symbolic detachment from the ways of the domain promotes normalization of the ethnographers' presence. In short, ethnographers eventually just fit into the domain they are studying.

3. *Disattending: Erosion of visibility by display of symbolic attachment.* In contrast to variation 2, in which the ethnographers eventually fit in, the third variation suggests that researchers should actively work toward invisibility by displaying attachment to the domain under study. This kind of attachment typically involves participating with ordinary inhabitants in their everyday routines. By working shoulder to shoulder with inhabitants, it is asserted, the researchers' ethnographer status becomes less of a focal point for members of the study.

4. *Disattending: Erosion of visibility by personalizing the ethnographer-informant relationship.* In the fourth variation, the relationship between ethnographers and inhabitants provides the researchers with their invisible status. Simply stated, the ethnographers become invisible because their informants suspend concern over the research aspect of their identity in favor of liking the researcher as a person.

5. *Misrepresentation: Masking real research interests.* This fifth variation is based on the premise that the greatest areas of inhabitant reactivity will be

in the areas the ethnographers announce to be their interest. Thus, if the ethnographers suggest false areas of interest, the assumption is that their real interest areas will be performed as though they were not present.

6. *Misrepresentation: Masking identity as ethnographer.* In the final variation suggested by Stoddart (1986), ethnographers do not represent themselves to the normal inhabitants as ethnographers: In other words, they conduct covert ethnography. Since the normal inhabitants of the domain under examination are not aware of the ethnographers' real activities in the setting, the ethnographers are socially invisible.

Dangers of Invisibility

From the ethnographers' perspective, it may seem ideal to obtain invisible status, but several ethical—or real—dangers exist. At least three types of dangers are inherent in conducting research invisibly. These include researcher-originated or intentional misidentification, accidental misidentification, and learning more than you want to know.

Intentional Misidentification. The first potential danger results when the ethnographers' intentional attempts to misrepresent their identity as researchers successfully isolate the subjects of a study. As Thomas's (Thomas & Swaine, 1928) frequently quoted statement expresses, "If men define situations as real, they are real to them in their consequences." In other words, when researchers misrepresent themselves and become invisible to normal inhabitants in a study domain, their assumed role as something else may be taken for real! For example, Rosenhan (1973), in a study of psychiatric hospitals, describes how he and several research associates became psychiatric patients (actually pseudopatients) by acting out various schizophrenic symptoms during intake assessments. By misrepresenting their role as researchers, Rosenhan and his associates managed to have themselves committed.

From the assumed identity of psychiatric patient, Rosenhan and his associates were able to observe and record the behavior of the hospital staff (nurses, aides, psychiatrists, and so on). After being admitted, all of the researchers discontinued their simulation of symptoms, but each had difficulty convincing doctors that they were not crazy! The length of stay in the hospitals ranged from 5 days to 52 days, with an average stay of 19 days. Eventually, each researcher was released with the discharge diagnosis of schizophrenia in remission.

Rosenhan's original purpose of demonstrating the effects of labeling in psychiatric facilities was accomplished, but this study further illustrates another point—the dangers for researchers of misidentifying themselves as other than ethnographers.

Accidental Misidentification. In contrast to intentional misidentification as researchers, ethnographers who gain invisible status may be found guilty by association. Persons outside the immediate domain under investigation may not know who the ethnographers are and simply assume they belong to the group. Although this may allow accurate assessment of many social interactions among the various participants, it is also potentially dangerous.

Particularly when investigating certain so-called deviant groups (for example, violent youth gangs, drug dealers or smugglers, car thieves) even if the ethnographers are socially invisible (as researchers) to members of this group, they may be taken as actual group members by others outside this group.

If, for example, ethnographers studying some youth gang were treated as invisible by members of this group, these interactions could be misinterpreted by members of a rival youth gang. As a result, the ethnographers' personal safety could be jeopardized in the event of a violent confrontation between the gangs. If the ethnographers are with one gang, they may be guilty of membership through association in the eyes of the rival gang.

Learning More Than You Want to Know. Another danger of researcher invisibility is learning more than you might want to know. During the course of an ethnographic study on adolescent involvement in alcohol, drugs, and crime (Berg et al., 1983), field ethnographers found that their presence was often invisible. It was common for the ethnographers to be present, for example, during criminal planning sessions. Often, the ethnographers had information concerning planned burglaries, drug deals, shoplifting sprees, car thefts, and fights several days before the event. In the case of this particular study, possession of this knowledge presented more of an ethical problem than a legal one, since the study group also possessed a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality.

Federal Certificates of Confidentiality ensure that all employees of a research study and all research documents are protected from subpoena in civil or criminal court actions. The certificate also specifies that the researchers cannot divulge confidential material. Thus, the field ethnographers could not divulge their knowledge of impending crimes without violating this agreement. Nonetheless, it was sometimes difficult for the field ethnographers to maintain their personal sense of integrity knowing in advance that certain crimes would occur and knowing also they could do nothing to stop them. One partial solution to the ethical/moral dilemma was an agreement among all of the study participants concerning special circumstances. Under certain special circumstances—that is, if information were obtained that convinced the ethnographers that someone's life or limb could be saved (for example, if a contract were placed on someone's life, or if plans were made to break someone's arm or leg)—appropriate authorities would be notified.

Certificates of Confidentiality. Certificates of Confidentiality are issued by the National Institute of Health (NIH) to protect the privacy of research subjects by ensuring that researchers and research institutes cannot be compelled to release information that could be used to identify subjects used in a given research study. Certificates of Confidentiality are issued on behalf of the researchers to their institutions or universities. Certificates of Confidentiality allow the researcher and others working on the project who have access to records and data to refuse to disclose identifying information in any civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceeding, whether at the federal, state, or local level. This translates quite literally into a protection for the interviewer from being compelled to bear witness against a subject whom the researcher may have heard or observed plan a crime.

Generally certificates are issued for a single research project and not for groups or classes of projects. In some instances, however, they can be issued to projects that may have multiple data-collection or analysis sites. The main or coordinating center (what may be called the lead institution) can apply on behalf of all the other research sites or institutions working on the project. It is the responsibility of the lead institution to ensure that all of the sites comply with the applications made on their behalf.

Application information for Certificates of Confidentiality can be found online at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/appl_extramural.htm. The application must be written on the university or research institute's letterhead and meet a number of human subject criteria, including assurances of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and having already been approved by the researcher's local institutional review board (see Chapter 3). Application for a Certificate of Confidentiality is not an assurance of being granted one.

OTHER DANGERS DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Most novice researchers do an effective job of protecting the rights and safety of their subjects. Less common among inexperienced researchers, however, are serious concerns during the design stage of research about the investigator's own personal safety. Some research, especially ethnographic research, may be in dangerous places or among dangerous people (Williams et al., 1992). Howell (1990), for example, discusses a number of crimes researchers are apt to encounter in the field (e.g., robbery, theft, rape, assault). Field investigators have encountered illness, personal injury, and even death during the course of ethnographic research.

Interestingly, the potential for personal or emotional harm to subjects is extensively covered in virtually all research methods books. The problem of personal or emotional harm to *researchers*, however, is seldom discussed (Sluka, 1990; Williams et al., 1992). Some basic elements about caution when

conducting research in general and ethnographic research in particular can be found—indirectly—in the broad methodological literature on ethnography (Adler, 1985; Adler & Adler, 1987; Broadhead & Fox, 1990; Fetterman, 1989; Johnson, 1990; Rose, 1990).

Yet, contemporary ethnographers often work in settings made dangerous by violent conflict or with social groups among whom interpersonal violence is commonplace. As Lee (2001) suggests, in many cases, it is the violence itself or the social conditions and circumstances that produce this violence that actively compel attention from the social scientist. Understanding that there are potential dangers and risks to the ethnographer, therefore, is an important lesson. Knowing about these risks allows the novice researcher to determine how best to deal with them, what precautions to take, and perhaps how to avoid them.

It is possible to identify at least two distinct forms of danger that may arise during the course of ethnographic research. These include *ambient* and *situational risks*. Similar distinctions have been offered by Lee (2001), Brewer (1993), and Sluka (1990).

Ambient dangers arise when a researcher exposes himself or herself to otherwise avoidable dangers, simply by having to be in a dangerous setting or circumstance to carry out the research. Nurses who conduct research in infectious disease wards, for example, place themselves in ambient danger.

Situational danger occurs when the researcher's presence or behaviors in the setting trigger conflict, violence, or hostility from others in the setting. For instance, an ethnographer researching tavern life, who engages in alcohol consumption as a means of gaining greater acceptance by regular participants, may also evoke trouble among the regular drinkers.

Often the safety precautions you must take in research amount to little more than good common sense. For instance, you should never enter the field without telling someone where you will be and when you expect to leave the field. You must learn to be aware of your environment. What's going on around you? Is it nighttime and dark out? Is it nighttime but well lighted? Are there other people around? Being aware of your environment also means knowing your location and the locations where help can be obtained quickly (e.g., locations of telephones, police stations, personal friends, etc.).

It is important for the researcher's safety to know insiders who are ready to vouch for him or her. Often a quick word from an established insider will reassure others in a group of the researcher's sincerity or purposes.

Additionally, there are places one should avoid if possible. For example, often I send my classes out to shopping malls to practice their observational skills. The single proviso I admonish students with is: Do not conduct observations in the public bathrooms! I do this not merely because public bathrooms are designed as places for private activities (although one could argue that ethical case). I do this because public bathrooms are potentially very dangerous places for researchers. Usually they are unmonitored and secluded

from the view of others. They are sometimes frequented by thieves trying to deal stolen property or drug dealers trying to sell their wares. In other words, public bathrooms may draw a variety of undesirable and dangerous people. If you are conducting actual research on activities in public bathrooms, of course, they cannot be avoided. However, in such a situation, you are likely to take proper safety precautions. For the casual practice of observational skills, however, bathrooms are simply too risky a setting.

It is also important to note that while potential risks to researchers clearly exist, only a very small proportion of researchers has ever actually been seriously injured or killed as a direct result of research (Williams et al., 1992). Perhaps one reason for this low injury rate is that experienced researchers do recognize the potential dangers and develop plans and procedures to reduce or avoid the risks involved.

WATCHING, LISTENING, AND LEARNING

Much ethnographic research involves entering the setting of some group and simply watching and listening attentively. Because it would be virtually impossible to observe everything or hear all that is going on at one time, ethnographers must watch and listen only to certain portions of what happens. One solution to this problem is to determine exactly what the researchers want to learn about at various points in the research.

Once the ethnographers have determined their essential aims, it should be possible to partition off the setting. This may be accomplished by bracketing certain subgroups of inhabitants of the domain and observing them during specific times, in certain locations, and during the course of particular events and/or routines. Frequently, a given partitioning snowballs into other relevant locations, subgroups, and activities. For example, during an ethnographic study of adolescents' involvement in alcohol, drugs, and crime (Carpenter et al., 1988), a central focus was how adolescents structured their leisure time. The ethnographers spatially began by spending time with adolescents during their free periods in local junior and senior high schools. Temporally, this meant during the time before classes in the morning (approximately one hour), during their lunch periods (approximately two hours), and after school was dismissed (approximately one hour).

In addition to learning how the observed youths structured their leisure time during these free-time periods on and around school campuses, the ethnographers began to learn where, when, and how youths spent their time outside of school. New spatial partitioning began to emerge and snowball. In addition to continuing their observations of the youths at and around school campuses, the ethnographers followed various subgroups of youths in other areas of the community and during various activities (both routine and special ones).

By the conclusion of 18 months of ethnography, the field-workers had observed youths in parks, skating rinks, people's homes, school dances, video arcades, bars, movie theaters, local forests, and an assortment of other locales.

Verenne (1988) similarly writes about how youths formed cliques and made use of various spaces throughout their high school and community. Describing the availability of spaces throughout the high school, Verenne (1988, p. 216) says:

The adults gave the students a complex building which, surprisingly for a modern construction, offered various types of spaces that various groups could call their own. For example, there were many tables in the cafeteria, there were nearly a dozen small and only intermittently occupied offices in the library, there were the guidance office and the nurses' office. There were bathrooms, isolated stairway landings, the backstage area in the auditorium. There were hidden spots on the grounds—behind bushes, in a drainage ditch.

Regarding some of the times and ways students used various spaces, Verenne (1988, p. 216) explains:

During the times when they were not required to be in class, the students thus continually had to make decisions about where to go or where to sit. By ordinary right they could be in only three places: the "commons" [the cafeteria was so designated when not in use for lunch], the library, or a study hall. By extraordinary right, most often by virtue of membership in some special "club," students could be found in the private offices in the back of the library, in the coordinator's office, in the room where the audiovisual equipment was kept. . . . By self-proclaimed right, students might also be found in the bathrooms for very long periods of time not solely dedicated to the satisfaction of biological functions, or on the stairway landing from which the roof could be reached.

As indicated by the preceding illustrations, often subjects group themselves in meaningful ways, which allows the ethnographer to observe them more systematically.

In some instances, the researchers can partition or restrict certain places where they watch and listen and increase observational capabilities through filming or videotaping the area. This style of observation has grown increasingly popular in educational settings. For example, in a study by Hart and Sheehan (1986), social and cognitive development among children during preschool years was investigated in relationship to play activities. To accomplish their study, Hart and Sheehan (1986, p. 671) restricted the use of the playground to two groups of preschoolers and videotaped the children at play:

For seven weeks from the beginning of the preschool year in the fall before the observations began, children from each of the two groups had equal access to both sides of the playground during their 30-minute outdoor play period each

day. During the observational period, barricades were placed in the access routes between the two playgrounds and children from each separate class . . . were asked to stay on an assigned side.

Videotaped observations then took place over a four-week period on fair weather days while preschool activities were conducted as usual. In general, the use and versatility of videotaping during research have increased enormously as the costs of doing so have continued to fall. Other uses of videotape in research are discussed in Chapter 8.

How to Learn: What to Watch and Listen For

When inexperienced ethnographers enter the field for the first time, they are impressed by the sheer number of activities and interactions going on in the setting. The initial activities of ethnographers frequently involve getting acclimated to the setting. This involves four general aspects:

1. Taking in the physical setting
2. Developing relationships with inhabitants (locating potential guides and informants)
3. Tracking, observing, eavesdropping, and asking questions
4. Locating subgroups and stars (central characters in various subgroups)

Taking in the Physical Setting. During the first few days, ethnographers usually wander around the general location they plan to use as the setting. As they walk around the area, they should begin to map the setting carefully. This may mean literally drawing an accurate facsimile of the various physical locales in the setting (that is, the streets, the buildings, the specific rooms where inhabitants pass their time, and so on). It may mean writing detailed field notes (to be discussed later) that describe the setting. Or it may mean some combination of both mapping and detailing in field notes.

Several purposes are served by this initial task of taking in the physical setting. First, while mapping out the spatial elements of the setting, researchers can begin to think about how to cover these areas in the most efficient and effective manner (for example, the number of hours required, which days or which hours during the day or night are best, and so forth).

Second, wandering around the area allows the ethnographers to begin getting acquainted with inhabitants and vice versa. Frequently, a smile or greeting during this initial phase will pay back tenfold later during the research.

Third, often merely by walking around and watching and listening, important first impressions are drawn. The first impressions may not be entirely accurate, but they will become *points of reference* later as the researchers become more familiar and knowledgeable about the setting and its inhabitants (Guv et al., 1987).

Developing Relationships with Inhabitants. During the initial phase of research in the field, researchers typically rely heavily on *guides*. Guides may have been located before the research through friends, acquaintances, or colleagues who knew someone among the group the researchers planned on studying. Alternatively, in the event that no guides can be identified before entering the field, one or more guides simply must be located during the early period following entry (Peshkin, 1986).

Concerning this latter form of locating guides, researchers may find that having smiled and greeted several inhabitants while taking in the setting actually becomes an essential means of beginning relationships. Although it is more difficult than simply walking up and introducing themselves, ethnographers are better advised to assume a more passive role until some relationships have been established.

The amount of receptivity shown by inhabitants varies (Adler & Adler, 1996; Argyris, 1952; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Frequently, inhabitants will respond to the ethnographers' greeting gestures with an inquiry about what the researchers are doing or who they are. This provides an opportunity for the researchers to explain their presence and strike an arrangement, perhaps, with the inquiring individual(s).

Researchers should remember that when they explain their presence in the field to locals, it is not a good idea to elaborate on technical details of the study. Generally, inhabitants are only interested in hearing a cursory answer to the questions, *What are you doing here?* and *Who are you?* A brief response typically will suffice. It is important, however, to answer any questions these inhabitants may ask about the project as clearly and truthfully as possible.

Another important point to impress on locals is that all information collected during the research study will be held in strict confidence. Similarly, it is critical to impress on potential guides that the researchers are who they claim to be. This may be simply accomplished by carrying a letter of introduction and photographic identification or it may require a more extensive process of having the potential guides check you out through either official channels (calling the sponsoring institution) or, in some situations, the guides' own channels!

Finally, researchers should assure potential guides that their extensive knowledge of the people and domain will make them extremely valuable to the study. Certainly, researchers should be cautious not to become overtly insincere in their flattery. But, in truth, guides do possess certain expert knowledge and are virtually invaluable to the ethnographers for helping them gain access.

Having established a rapport with one or more guides, ethnographers can begin snowballing additional relationships with other inhabitants. The most direct way to accomplish this is to gain permission from the guides to spend some time hanging around the setting with them. As others begin to pass time in proximity, the ethnographers can ask questions of their guides

about these others and may possibly obtain an introduction—including having the guides reassure newcomers of the legitimacy of the ethnographers.

Tracking, Observing, Eavesdropping, and Asking Questions. Having established relationships with several guides and inhabitants, ethnographers are free to begin really learning what goes on among the inhabitants of their study domain. This is done by tracking, observing, eavesdropping, and asking questions.

Tracking literally means following the guides around during their usual daily routines and watching their activities and the other people they interact with. As researchers follow and observe, they can also eavesdrop on conversations. Although social norms typically prohibit eavesdropping, such a proscription is untenable when conducting ethnography. Bogdan (1972) similarly suggests that although eavesdropping is necessary, it is also sometimes difficult to accomplish for people who have been reared in a noneavesdropping society. Nonetheless, researchers often learn a great deal about a phenomenon or an event simply by overhearing several people discussing it.

On some occasions, during the process of eavesdropping, researchers hear terms or learn about situations that may be important but that fall on deaf ears. In other words, the ethnographers do not understand the significance of what they hear. On these occasions, ethnographers must ask questions, but, again, they should consider taking a passive role during such informal questioning. Perhaps jotting a cryptic note to ask the guide at a later time would serve better than interrupting the ongoing action with a question. Or perhaps arranging another meeting with some participant in the conversation (other than the guide) would offer a more fruitful approach. Decisions about how to pursue information will vary from situation to situation.

Locating Subgroups and Stars. During the course of tracking and observing, ethnographers are able to identify certain inhabitants who tend to spend more time with one another than with others. These subgroupings may or may not represent formal groups but certainly suggest a kind of social networking. Among these social networks, researchers can sociometrically identify individuals who appear to be more or less the central figures in a given network of inhabitants. Such central figures may be referred to as *stars*. Although ethnographers may not always need to establish a guide-type relationship with a star, it is sometimes necessary to obtain his or her goodwill.

In a manner similar to what Bogdan and Taylor (1975, pp. 30–33) describe as accessing *gatekeepers*, developing a relationship with a star may be a critical element in an ethnographic project. Even when ethnographers locate a guide and gain access to the basic setting, a star may hold the key to deeper penetration into the lives and perceptions of inhabitants of that setting. Sometimes a single gesture or word from a star will open more doors than weeks and weeks of attempts to gain access to these portals. Conversely, that same

single gesture can slam doors that took months for the ethnographer to get opened. Whenever possible, it is advisable to find and gain the confidence of a star as soon as possible after entering the field.

Field Notes

The central component of ethnographic research is the *ethnographic account*. Providing such narrative accounts of what goes on in the lives of study subjects derives from having maintained complete, accurate, and detailed field notes. From the approach endorsed here, field notes should be completed immediately following every excursion into the field, as well as following any chance meeting with inhabitants outside the boundaries of the study setting (for example, at the supermarket, in a doctor's office, at a traffic light, and so on).

There are many variations about how to take field notes. Some researchers wait until they have left the field and then immediately write complete records (Bogdan, 1972). Others take abbreviated notes covertly while in the field and later translate them into complete field notes (see Festinger et al., 1956). Burgess (1991a, p. 192) suggests that "note-taking is a personal activity that depends upon the research context, the objectives of the research, and the relationship with informants." Burgess (1991a) also suggests that there are some general rules for note-taking. Among these rules are recommendations for establishing a regular time and place for writing up one's notes (including the date, time, and location of the observations) and duplicating notes for safety reasons.

Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (2001) have devised a list of what they believe should go into all field notes. This list includes the date, time, and place of the observations; specific facts, numbers, and details of what happened at the site; sensory impressions such as sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes; personal responses as recorded in the field notes; specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language; questions about people or behaviors at the site for future consideration; and page numbers to keep the observations in order.

Carol Bailey (1996, pp. 80–81) claims that field notes initially consist of *mental notes*, collected while interacting in the research setting. These are then transformed into *jotted notes*, or brief reminder notes actually written down and used later to jog the researcher's memory when he or she writes more complete field notes.

There are various ways to take field notes. For example, some ethnographers carry tape recorders and periodically enter their own notes or record various conversations they witness. Other researchers carry slips of paper or index cards and simply jot notes and verbatim quotes periodically throughout the field excursion. Once out of the field, the researchers can use these notes and sketches to write full accounts. Given the advances in computers and computer software (as well as the radical cost and weight reduction in

highly powerful laptop and notebook computers), many modern-day ethnographers write and store their field notes on computer disks. In addition to the advantage of compact storage, word-processing and utility programs allow ethnographers to move rapidly from one location in the notes to another to reconstruct sequences of events over time by copying and editing out extraneous elements and to produce copies of portions of the full notes at the press of a button.

From my perspective there are four distinct elements that go into creating full and detailed field notes: cryptic jottings, detailed descriptions, analytic notes, and subjective reflections.

Cryptic Jottings. Cryptic jottings are taken while still in the field. These may include brief statements (a sentence or less), sketches (line drawings), short notes (a paragraph or so), and odd or unusual terms or phrases heard while in the field that might serve as a memory trigger later when writing full field notes.

Detailed Descriptions. Detailed descriptions are undertaken once you have exited the field. Detailed descriptions are the heart of any narrative field notes. They should include as much texture, sensation, color, and minutia as your memory permits. Conversations should be replicated as near to verbatim as memory permits (the cryptic jotting can help a great deal with this). Details should include how people appeared, what they said, what they did, and even if they had any noticeable imperfections (speech impediments, scars, tattoos, etc.).

Analytic Notes. Analytic notes, sometimes referred to as *observer comments*, are ideas that occur to you as you write up the full field notes. These may be linkages between people in the study, theories that might serve to explain something happening in the field, or simply a judgmental observation about a participant (e.g., "The guy looked like a thug"). To make sure these are kept separate from the actual narrative, it is important to encapsulate these in brackets clearly labeled *Observer Comments*, or simply O.C. (e.g., [O.C.]).

Subjective Reflections. Subjective reflections are a self-reflexive opportunity for you as the researcher to make personal observations and comments about feelings that you might have developed as a result of having observed some scary or personally rewarding event in the field. These may include statements about how angry something made you or how surprised you were when you learned some piece of information. Like *observer comments*, these remarks should be encapsulated in brackets, labeled *Subjective Reflections*, or S.R. (e.g., [S.R.]).

Several additional elements to include in field notes are the time and duration of the field excursion and a consistent alteration of names and places.

Concerning the former, in addition to indicating the time researchers enter and exit the field, it is important to make note of the time at which conversations, events, or activities occurred throughout the field session. These temporal sequencing marks allow ethnographers to recreate more systematically the field session. With regard to the latter issue of altering the names of people and places, the point is to protect the identities of inhabitants. Toward this end, it is advisable for ethnographers to maintain a continuous list of pseudonyms assigned to every person and location recorded in their field notes. This will assist both confidentiality and systematic retrieval of data during later analysis phases of the research.

Finally, even the opinions, preconceived notions, and general feelings about certain observed situations are also legitimate entries in field notes. However, these ethnographer-originated entries should always be bracketed and identified so that they are not mistaken as actual observations or perceptions the inhabitants themselves made.

Erosion of Memory. Individuals vary in the extent and degree of accuracy with which they can remember—in detail—events and conversations witnessed during a field excursion. Through repetition, concentration, and sincere effort, the researchers' ability to retain even minute elements, such as facial grimaces, tongue clicks, and even belt-buckle ornaments, begins to increase greatly. In addition, carefully concentrating on remembering elements of observed situations assists ethnographers in maintaining their role as researchers.

Clues and Strategies for Recalling Data. Although precise reproduction of every nuance of behavior, conversation, and event during a field excursion is impossible, highly accurate, detailed field notes can be produced. Novice ethnographers are frequently quite amazed to learn just how much material they can recall (over a short period of time) even without any specific training.

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), many field observers use the analogy of a *switch* to describe their procedure for remembering people, conversations, and details of a setting. These individuals suggest that they can literally turn on and turn off the intense concentration necessary for good-quality recall.

Of course, as they gain experience, ethnographers tend to develop their own cryptic note-taking styles for use in the field. Nonetheless, several general suggestions can be offered to novice ethnographers to facilitate their recollection of events that occur during a field session. Some suggestions have been implied or mentioned previously in this chapter and are summarized here for the sake of convenience.

1. *Record key words and key phrases while in the field.* It would be ill-advised to try to stop the participants in a conversation and attempt to write down

their every word. It would also be distracting to pull out a tape recorder and place it between the participants in a natural conversation. On the other hand, it may be possible during the course of their conversation to abstract certain key terms or sentences and jot these down. Whether researchers write these phrases on a napkin, an index card, or a scrap of brown paper bag is unimportant. What is important is that these phrases are taken down. It is also advisable to indicate the time the conversation occurred. Interestingly, later, in the privacy of their offices, ethnographers can usually reconstruct almost the entire conversation simply by rereading these cryptic key terms and sentences. Researchers typically will have a certain amount of memory erosion, but because of the memory-triggering effects of the key words and phrases, this erosion should be lessened.

2. *Make notes about the sequence of events.* From one perspective, activities occurring during a field session are beyond the control of the ethnographers and are consequently unstructured. However, if ethnographers gain a certain perspective, it is possible to apply a kind of pseudostructure: identifying a sequence of events. As researchers jot brief, cryptic notes, they should indicate their observed sequence of events: what occurred before the noted action, what was observed, and what occurred following this noted event. Researchers frequently find it useful, when sorting through their scraps of in-field notes, to lay them out in sequence. By rethinking the field session, following the sequence in which it actually occurred, researchers are able to recall the details and substance of even very long conversations.

3. *Limit the time you remain in the setting.* Field-note writing operates at approximately a 4:1 ratio with the time in the field. If researchers spend two hours in the field, it may require as long as eight full hours to write comprehensive field notes. Particularly for novice ethnographers, whose skill at recall may not be fully developed, only very short (15–30 minute) intervals in the field should be attempted at first. Although it is sometimes tempting to remain in the field for hours and hours, researchers must remember that in doing so, they reduce the likelihood of producing high-quality, detailed field notes.

On occasion, of course, ethnographers may be willing to forgo comprehensive notes in order to gain entry to some special event or ceremony. On these occasions, researchers actually turn off their intentional field concentration until the special event occurs. This, too, should be mentioned in the notes in order to account for the two or three hours during which nothing has been annotated in the field notes.

4. *Write the full notes immediately after exiting the field.* Although this may seem obvious, it still needs to be mentioned. As previously indicated, erosion of memory begins immediately and progresses rapidly. The longer researchers wait to translate their cryptic notes to full notes, the greater the like-

likelihood of contamination from erosion. It is advisable to schedule field sessions in such a manner that full notes can be written immediately after exiting the field. Even the interruption for a meal could be sufficient to flaw the full notes.

5. *Get your notes written before sharing them with others.* Ethnographic research is often very exciting. Ethnographers frequently observe some event or conversation that so excites them that they simply need to share it with someone (often a colleague). The basic rule of thumb here is to refrain from talking; write it up and talk about it later. Besides possibly forgetting important details from a time lag before writing up notes, researchers may also accidentally embellish events. Although this embellishment may be completely unintentional, it can still flaw and contaminate otherwise important data.

What Complete Notes Should Look Like. Both in order to increase the systematic structure of later data retrieval and in order to ensure comprehensive detail without loss of quality, field-note pages should be standardized as much as possible. This means that every sheet of field notes should contain certain consistent elements: the time the ethnographer entered and exited the field; the date of the field session; a brief, descriptive topic label that captures the essence of the field session; and a page number.

As an illustration, consider the following field-note excerpt, which represents approximately two or three minutes in the field setting:

June 15, 2002, Longlane Beach

Time In: 10:00 A.M.

Time Out: 11:00 A.M.

TIME: 10:00 A.M. [O.C.: I arrived at the beach and found parking. It was slightly overcast out and gray—June gloom—as many locals called it.] I exited my car and walked toward the pier. There were many empty stalls near the pier and only a few cars pulling in. I walked up a set of cement steps to the wooden pier. The pier stretched for about a quarter of a mile into the ocean and was about 20 feet wide. At the end of the pier was a fast-food restaurant called Jaspers. I could see several people standing at the end of the pier fishing.

There were no people standing along the railings toward my end of the pier, but a tall, very slim man in his early forties had just exited the public bathrooms located at the base of the pier, about 12 feet from where I stood. He walked swiftly toward and then past me. He was wearing a bright orange tank top and black narrow Speedo trunks. His hair was graying and thin; his face was long and narrow and was punctuated by a huge, gray mustache that flowed into double-turned handlebars at each end. Around his waist he wore a fanny-pack that bounced as he moved toward Jaspers at the end of the pier. On his feet the man wore water socks with a Nike swoosh on the side.

I walked toward Jaspers and was about a halfway there when I noticed a woman walking toward me (away from Jaspers). The woman, in her late

twenties or early thirties, held the hand of a small boy who was screaming, "I want ice cream! I want ice cream!" Streams of tears were running down the little boy's cheeks. The boy was about three or four years old and wearing a pair of swim trunks with the Big Dog logo on it, no shirt and barefoot. The woman wore a blue cover-up (like a sarong). Her blonde hair was pulled back and held with a wooden clip. Her face was almost hidden by an oversized pair of black sunglasses. On her feet she wore black flip-flops.

As illustrated in the preceding field-note excerpt, considerable detail about the setting and the people moving around in this setting is included. As well, the notes begin with an example of how an observer comment might be included. After reading the ethnographer's full field notes, it should be possible for a person to visualize exactly what the ethnographer saw and heard during the field session.

Having concluded their field sessions (the data-gathering phase of the project) the ethnographers will have presumably amassed hundreds or even thousands of pages of field notes. These field notes will take up considerable space and an even longer time to read. Organizing large quantities of such notes is very time consuming and both physically and mentally exhausting. It is desirable, then, to amass these notes in some systematic fashion and perhaps even to reduce their bulk for analytic purposes (Becker, Gordon, & LeBailly, 1984).

To accomplish the dual task of keeping large quantities of field notes and reproducing them in reduced form, many researchers rely on computers. An additional advantage to using computers, beyond storage and reproduction, is their ability to allow textual material to be retrieved in an efficient and speedy manner. There are several ways one can make use of computers when developing field notes. The most obvious is to use any commercial word-processing program. Word-processing programs are designed to handle, store, and retrieve textual material or, in this case, data. Alternately, one might choose one of the commercial programs designed for qualitative data storage and analysis (see, for example, Dennis, 1984; Tallerico, 1991). These programs provide a structure into which novice researchers can pour their field notes. As well, they provide a method by which to efficiently create a duplicate set or a data-reduced set of field notes.

You must be cautious when reducing qualitative data such as field notes. If you reduce too much, details and nuance of the data may be lost, impairing if not ruining the analysis. As well, some studies will require greater amounts of detail than others (Becker, Gordon, & LeBailly, 1984). In these cases, field notes will need to be kept closer to their original form. In most cases, however, various aspects of field notes may be redundant. For example, descriptions of the same individuals, locations, and settings need not be reproduced in full every time they arise. Researchers may find it better to briefly summarize such material or cite it only once. Similarly, many researchers find it more

effective for analytical purposes to create a set of summarized field notes that is keyed or cross-indexed to its original lengthier versions. Thus, two or three pages of notes may be reproduced to perhaps a half page of summary. Since the full notes are cross-indexed to this summary, the researcher can fairly easily retrieve these lengthier versions during analysis.

COMPUTERS AND ETHNOGRAPHY

At one time—in fact, as recently as the last edition of this book—the basic recommendation with regard to computers and ethnography was that using computers was a convenient way to write, store, and even access written field notes. But, as a number of writers have been pointing out during the past several years, *there are a lot more interesting things for ethnographers to do with computers than just write up field notes!* (See, for example, Coffey, Atkinson, & Holbrook, 1996; Dicks & Mason, 1998; Mason & Dicks, 1999; Weaver & Atkinson, 1994). With new types of computing media provided by the Web, CD-ROMs, high-speed DSL, and other sorts of broadband connections, a new world has opened to ethnographers. It may be as Mason and Dicks (1999) suggest that *hypermedia ethnography* is the new frontier.

This new hypermedia ethnography can permit ethnographers to include the full gamut of what Spradely (1979) terms the *ethnographic record*: photographs, music, field notes, interview data, and so forth. The new computer technologies allow the ethnographer to bridge the gaps that exist between audio, visual, and written documentation of field events. Hypermedia potentially allows the ethnographer to produce more richly textured and at the same time more accessible (in the broadest sense of this term) narrative reports, complete with an assortment of links among data, analysis, and interpretative and supportive texts that might comment on the analysis (Gibbs, Friese, & Mangabeira, 2002).

Although qualitative researchers have been slower than their quantitative counterparts to take advantage of the new technological benefits afforded by computers and the Internet, as suggested here and in Chapter 4, qualitative researchers are now seemingly making up for lost time. But before anyone can run off too quickly and post ethnographies on the Web with all sorts of interesting links, the researcher needs to analyze the data.

ANALYZING ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

Analysis of data is not an exact science. With some types of data (particularly survey questionnaire data), there are many different ways to make sense of the information once the data are collected, organized, and coded. However, when

dealing with ethnographic data, researchers must make somewhat narrower choices. For example, even though it is certainly possible to test hypotheses using ethnographic data, the process differs somewhat from research that uses survey data. Ethnographic research can potentially demonstrate the plausibility of a hypothesis, but it cannot actually prove its validity. Using reductionistic procedures to cull numbers from the ethnographic data is not really in keeping with the ethnographic process. Thus, two effective ways remain to analyze ethnographic research while preserving the rich textual detail of the data: inductive content analysis and ethnographic narrative accounts.

Systematic analysis of ethnographic data typically begins by reading the field notes—whether one wants to produce ethnographic accounts or a content analysis of the data. The purposes of this initial reading of the notes are to reinforce any hypotheses or themes developed during the data-collection phase and to generate new hypotheses and themes previously unrealized—in short, to ground themes and hypotheses to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this initial coding, researchers undertake what is called *open coding* (explained comprehensively in Chapter 11). Briefly, open coding allows researchers to identify and even extract themes, topics, or issues in a systematic manner.

Next, ethnographers should begin to notice and systematically create records of patterns in the conversations and activities of people depicted in the notes. This *coding* process is discussed more completely in Chapter 11.

At this juncture, the researchers must decide whether to undertake a comprehensive content analysis or to rely on lengthy textual accounts to document themes and patterns observed in the data. Although both procedures are certainly similar, there is at least one important difference, which concerns whether, conceptually, ethnography is viewed strictly as a means for collecting data or as both the means and the product of the ethnographic process (Stoddart, 1986). In the first instance, researchers may easily accomplish a comprehensive content analysis, but if the second conceptual stance is taken, the researchers must demonstrate topics and patterns by presenting appropriate (and often lengthy) narrative textual accounts from the field notes.

As with all analytic strategies, strengths and weaknesses are associated with each approach. The most important problem commonly associated with qualitative data of any type is the question of confidence in the accuracy of suggested patterns. In the case of content analysis, researchers might manage to convince their audience by suggesting the magnitude (frequency) of a given theme or pattern (see Chapter 11). In the case of ethnographic narratives, researchers must rely on the pattern being sufficiently clear in itself (as presented in the field notes) to convince an audience of its accuracy (Stoddart, 1986).

Burns (1980) illustrates how one effectively uses ethnographic narrative accounts in his "Getting Rowdy with the Boys." Burns offers a detailed examination of the drinking behavior of a single group of young working-class males. His procedure involves describing the sequence of events and interac-

tions experienced by these young men during one evening in several different drinking environments. As Burns indicates, his analysis of the ethnographic narrative account offered may be termed *thick description* (Geertz, 1973). This type of analysis is directed toward drawing out a complete picture of the observed events, the actors involved, the rules associated with certain activities, and the social contexts in which these elements arise. Burns (1980) accomplishes this by first presenting the narration (chiefly the detailed field notes of his ethnographic experience during the observed evening). Next, Burns steps out of the field and, in his role as a social scientist, analyzes the narrative contents, highlighting apparent structural components of situations, meanings suggested by actors and events, and patterns that emerge during the course of the narrative. To some extent, this lengthier narrative technique is justified in the following passage from Festinger et al. (1956, p. 252):

Our material is largely qualitative rather than quantitative, and even simple tabulations of what we observed would be difficult. Owing to the complete novelty and unpredictability of the movement, as well as the pressure of time, we could not develop standard categories of events, actions, statements, feelings, and the like, and certainly could not subject the members of the group to any standardized interview, in order to compare indices before and after disconfirmation.

In a similar manner, Humphreys (1970, p. 22) states:

My concern in this study has been with the description of a specific style of deviant behavior and of the population who engage in that activity. Beyond such systematic, descriptive analysis, I have tried to offer, in the light of deviance theory, some explanation as to why, and how these people participate in the particular form of behavior described [namely, casual homosexual encounters].

OTHER ANALYSIS STRATEGIES: TYPOLOGIES, SOCIOGRAMS, AND METAPHORS

Data analysis is an interesting and creative part of the research process. Ethnographic data lend themselves to several different methods of interpretation and analysis beyond strict content analysis techniques. Some of these techniques include *typologies*, *sociograms*, and *metaphors*. Each of these is briefly discussed next.

Typologies

A *typology* is a systematic method for classifying similar events, actions, objects, people, or places, into discrete groupings. For example, McSkimming and Berg (1996) did a study of gambling and gaming in rural American towns.

After more than six months of observations in the field, they found four major types of tavern patrons:

1. *Regular drinking patrons.* These individuals regularly sat at the bar and chatted among themselves as they consumed several alcoholic beverages. They were highly in-group oriented and would not speak with outsiders (transient patrons).
2. *Regular gaming patrons.* These individuals sporadically consumed alcoholic beverages but primarily socialized with others involved mostly in playing darts or billiards.
3. *Regular gambling patrons.* These individuals sporadically consumed alcoholic beverages and involved themselves in darts and/or billiards. A primary distinction between these and gaming patrons was that gambling patrons regularly placed wagers (of cash, drinks, or other valuable items) against the outcome of a dart or billiard game.
4. *Transient patrons.* These individuals drifted into and out of the tavern scene, sometimes returning for a second or occasionally a third visit but not with any sort of regular pattern of attendance. Transient patrons were excluded from conversations among regular drinking patrons but were permitted to game and gamble occasionally with others.

McSkimming and Berg's (1996) typology permitted them to see various distinctions between the various people who frequented the tavern. For example, regular drinkers were more interested in *maintaining* friendships with one another and discussing family activities than with establishing new friendships or light social banter. Such observations permitted McSkimming and Berg to better understand some of the social roles and interaction patterns they observed among people moving through the social world of the tavern.

Not all typologies are textually based. Again, owing to changes in technology and a growing emphasis in visual ethnography or photoethnography (Pink, 2001; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1997), some typologies are photographically based. For example, in a recent study by Kephart and Berg (2002) the researchers examined 452 photographs of graffiti created by gangs in a city in southern California. After carefully examining each photo for patterns of similarity or dissimilarity, they sorted the pictures into five groups: (1) Publicity Graffiti (spreading the gang's name); (2) Roll Call Graffiti (listing the names of the members of the gang); (3) Territorial Graffiti (the name of the gang in specific locations identifying turf); (4) Threatening Graffiti (specific threats toward other gangs or individuals); and (5) Sympathetic Graffiti (condolences to gang members and their families upon deaths).

Typically, researchers follow a basic three-step guideline for developing typologies. First, they assess the collected material and then seek out mutually exclusive categories. Second, researchers make sure that all of the elements being classified have been accounted for (an exhaustive grouping of elements).

Third, researchers examine the categories and their contents and make theoretically meaningful appraisals. The use of mutually exclusive categories assures that every element being considered appears only in a single category. But, to be exhaustive, every element needs to be placed into one or another of these categories. A theoretically meaningful appraisal does not necessarily mean that you link your observations to lofty theories such as Durkheim's theory of *anomie*. Rather, it simply means that there is an attempt to attach some social meaning to the way things fall into categories in your typology.

Although typologies may seem like oversimplification of social life, this is actually their beauty. They permit the researcher to present data in an organized and simple fashion, allowing the reader to better understand the explanations offered as interpretation and analysis of the typology scheme. A major goal of typologies, then, is to provide additional understanding of the material collected during the course of the research.

Sociograms

Sociograms are part of a larger group of techniques known as *sociometry*. These procedures allow the researcher to make assessments about the degree of affinity or disdain that members of a group have toward one another. Thus, they allow you to consider friendship patterns, social networks, work relationships, and social distance in general. Sociometry can be described as a means of assessing group relational structures such as hierarchies, friendship networks, and cliques. Sociograms, then, are graphic displays of how well people get along with one another based on responses to a sociometric test. A sociometric test typically includes three basic characteristics:

1. A specific number of choices are used (varying with the size of the group).
2. A specific number of choices are allowed (varying according to the functions and/or activities of the groups tested).
3. Different levels of preference are assigned to each choice.

Positive Peer Nominations. The early users of sociometric tests typically employed a *peer nomination* version of this test. In this procedure, the group members were asked to name three or more peers whom they liked the most, or whom they best liked working with, or who were their best friends (depending on the kind of group). A group member's score was then computed as the number of nominations he or she received from other members of the group. This version of the sociometric test is called *positive peer nominations*. As users of sociometric tests refined these procedures, adaptations naturally arose.

Negative Peer Nominations. One such adaptation to peer nominations initially was introduced by Durrant (1957).

Undergraff (1964). This adaptation involved a request for negative nominations. In other words, in addition to asking for three especially liked peers, a second request was made that members identify the three peers least liked (or least desirable to work with). This strategy was used to identify two groups of peers—namely, a *popular group* (high frequency of positive nominations) and a *disliked or rejected group* (high frequency of negative nominations). Subsequent research in which juveniles are identified as members of these groups indicates that rejected children often are more aggressive and likely to engage in antisocial behavior (Dodge, Cole, & Brakke, 1982; Hartup et al., 1967). This suggests significant utility for those interested in studying delinquents, youth movements, school cliques, and even gang structures.

Peer Rating Procedures. Another adaptation that has come into common use is the *peer rating procedure*, a sociometric test similar in many ways to the nomination procedure. Group members respond to the usual sociometric questions (Who do you like to work with? Be with? etc.) for every other member of the group. Each group member is given a list containing the names of all group members and asked to rate every other member using a five-point Likert-like scale. The scale for these five points is typically a graduated series of statements that moves from expressions of favor to expressions of disfavor for members of the group. An example of this sort of scale is shown in Figure 6.1. As in traditional Likert scales, you assess the mean rating score for each person. A mean rating in the low range indicates that the group member is not well liked by others in the group. A mean rating in the high range indicates that the group member is well liked. As Jennings (1948) warned, however, identification of this sociometric pattern is *not* the completion of the research but only the beginning. The use of mathematics to locate sociometric stars, then, should not be overemphasized. It is a convenient tool but not the substantive result of research.

Once you have identified the social relations and social structures that exist, you still must examine the incumbents of positions in this structure. Assisted by the sociometric information, you are better equipped to locate appropriate guides, informants, and gatekeepers of the group. Thus, you might begin an investigation with a sociometric survey and then pursue the research through other ethnographic field techniques, interviews, or even unobtrusive measures. Sociometric choice tests, then, provide yet another line of action you can use in a triangulated research design.

Mapping and the Creation of Sociograms. Another way you can create sociograms is to do them in the field. In this case, you use direct observations of individuals and objects as they are arranged in the setting. Essentially, this involves the creation of social/environmental maps and, from these, sociograms.

This strategy of sociometric mapping depends on a fairly stable setting, and as such, it is not always applicable. Often, this type of sociometric map-

FIGURE 6.1 A Sample Sociometric Assessment

(Question/Choices)

Directions: On a separate sheet, write the name of everyone in your group or organization. Read the following paragraphs and place their corresponding numbers in front of every name for which they apply. You may use the number one only once, and please place only a single number by each name. By your own name, please place a zero.

My Very Best Friend

1. I would like to have this person as one of my very best friends. I would like to spend a great deal of time with this person. I think I could tell some of my problems and concerns to this person, and I would do everything I could to help this person with his or her problems and concerns. I will give a number 1 to my very best friend.

My Other Friend(s)

2. I would enjoy working and doing things with this person. I would invite this person to a party in my home, and I would enjoy going places with this person and our other friends. I would like to talk and do a variety of things with this person and to be with this person often. I want this person to be one of my friends. I will give a number 2 to every person who is my friend.

I Do Not Know This Person

3. I do not know this person very well. Maybe I would like this person if I got to know him or her; maybe I would not. I do not know whether I would like to spend time or work with this person. I will place a number 3 in front of the name of every person I do not know very well.

I Do Not Care for This Person

4. I will greet this person when I see him or her around school or in a store, but I do not enjoy being around this person. I might spend some time with this person—if I had nothing to do, or I had a social obligation to attend where this person also was in attendance. I do not care for this person very much. I will place a number 4 in front of the name of every person I do not care for very much.

I Dislike This Person

5. I speak to this person only when it is necessary. I do not like to work or spend time with this person. I avoid serving on the same groups or committees with this person. I will place a number 5 in front of the name of every person I do not like.

ping is used in social psychological applications of organizational research. For example, how executives place themselves around a board meeting table may be mapped and may delineate power and informal influence structures. By knowing this information, a researcher (or executive) can interrupt or weaken the amount of influence emanating from certain segments of the members. For

instance, by placing himself or herself or a nonmember of some informal influence clique among several actual members, he or she can affect the ability of those members to wield influence and authority during a board meeting.

Similarly, knowledge about sociometric body language and even furniture placement can influence interactions. For example, when you enter someone's office, how is it arranged? Is there a chair near the desk, inviting you to sit near the desk's occupant? Or is the chair far from the desk, perhaps across the room, requiring a guest to physically move it to be near the desk's occupant? Usually, when you move furniture in another person's office, you must first ask permission. Thus, tacitly, you hold a subordinate role in the relationship. Alternately, you might choose to stand while the other party sits. This, of course, immediately shifts the power structure to the seated occupant of the office because he or she is able to leave you standing or suggest you pull up a chair. This situation is also somewhat reminiscent of school days, when you were called before the school's principal where you stood, at the foot of the desk, being scolded.

The arrangement of people and objects in a setting may have an impact on interactions and relationships. This, in turn, can be a useful tool in research. This type of applied sociometric strategy frequently begins with a *mapping* of the setting. This sort of mapping is also useful in other types of institutional investigations. For example, it could prove useful in a study of how inmates use environmental space in a prison or a study of the effect of environmental design on inmates. Alternatively, it might prove fruitful in an examination of how children use and perhaps territorially divide playground space. It might even be useful in a study of a game arcade located in some mall or in similar studies of leisure-time activities in amusement parks. Again, sociometric strategies are extremely flexible. They are limited only by your imagination.

To describe how you might develop the sort of sociometric maps just discussed, let us assume an investigator wants to study some group of youths in a particular neighborhood. One way to begin this task is to create a drawing or *map* of the setting. All the stable physical elements observed in the setting (for example, access ways, trees and shrubs, buildings, stores, street lamps, public telephones, and so forth) should be included in this map. The map might be duplicated a number of times so that every time the researcher enters the field, he or she can work on a fresh map.

While in the field, the researcher can add symbols to represent individual gang members, dyads (groups of two), triads (groups of three), gender, leadership roles, and so forth. Over time, and by assessing the successive annotated maps and actual field notes, the researcher will be able to identify the stars and any satellite cliques that constitute the groups under study. Stars will become apparent *over time* when you use observation to create a sociogram. Typically, you find only one or two stars in a given group. Even when you locate several stars, typically one will demonstrate himself or herself to hold some degree of influence over the others.

Satellite cliques are sometimes mistaken as representing a star and his or her followers. In fact, satellite cliques usually contain several members influenced by what appears to be a single individual. However, this individual frequently is himself or herself influenced by a more centralized star.

Sociometric maps also can assist the investigator in understanding how a group uses its environmental space and maintains territorial control over areas, the locus of control in various power and influence arrangements, and the social space (proximity) between different members and nonmembers of the group(s).

Metaphors

Another analytic strategy is to use metaphors (Bailey, 1996; Richardson, 1994). *Metaphors* are comparisons such as "the skinhead's scalp was like velvet, smooth and soft to the touch." Identifying a metaphor that fits some aspect of your setting or your study population can help you see things in a different way. Begin by asking, "What does this situation or circumstance seem to be?" "What else is it like?" "What does it remind me of?" Trying to come up with an appropriate metaphor is a good exercise for reflecting on the material and data you have already collected and begun to interpret and analyze. It also will require you to consider these data from different conceptual angles than you might otherwise have used.

For example, you might consider the way police arrest suspects, only to have the courts let them go (on bail, for example) as *revolving door justice*. Or you might consider the way nurses give reports as an informational *swap-meet*. Metaphors provide an avenue to see important elements of social support, interaction, networking, relationships, and a variety of other socially significant factors, and allow the researcher to represent action when theorizing about various explanations or relationships.

DISENGAGING: GETTING OUT

Although it is certainly possible to maintain complete professional distance when distributing questionnaires to anonymous subjects, it is not as easy during ethnography. Because relationships are virtually the stock and trade of a good ethnographer, care must be taken when leaving the field.

Exiting any field setting involves at least two separate operations: first, the physical removal of the researchers from the research setting and, second, emotional disengagement from the relationships developed during the field experience. In some situations *getting out* is described as a kind of mechanical operation, devoid of any (personal) emotional attachments on the part of the ethnographer. Concern is sometimes shown, and efforts made, to avoid distressing a research community. However, negative repercussions can occur in

the forms of possible effects on the group(s) as a whole or with the possible reception future field investigators might expect (Chadwick et al., 1984; Shaffir et al., 1980).

Even when the emotions of field relationships are mentioned, they frequently are described exclusively as concern over the perspective of the inhabitant of the natural setting. For example, Shaffir et al. (1980, p. 259) state:

Personal commitments to those we study often accompany our research activity. Subjects often expect us to continue to live up to such commitments permanently. On completing the research, however, our commitment subsides and is often quickly overshadowed by other considerations shaping our day-to-day lives. When our subjects become aware of our diminished interest in their lives and situations, they may come to feel cheated—manipulated and duped.

The point is not to underplay the possible emotional harm a callous investigator might cause a research group, but it should be noted that relationships are two-way streets. Subjects make personal emotional commitments, and so, too, do many researchers—even without actually bonding. Often, when researchers leave the field, they have developed some deep feelings for their subjects. These feelings may not always be positive but are nonetheless psychologically affecting.

Ethnographers can certainly absent themselves from the field and simply dismiss the subjects from their minds, but it is likely that the ethnographers will continue to hold at least some proprietary interest in the welfare of the subjects. For example, during the course of conducting the research discussed in Carpenter et al. (1988), the ethnographers commonly spoke about “their” kids with almost parental concern or, on occasion, with almost parental pride in certain accomplishments.

A strong commitment and attachment developed between many of the youthful subjects and the ethnographers. When it came time to leave the field, the ethnographers informally continued to keep an eye on many of the subjects for over a year. This essentially amounted to asking about specific kids when they accidentally ran into mutual acquaintances or getting involved in the lives of these special kids when their paths crossed by chance (for instance, in a supermarket or shopping mall). Other field investigators have indicated similar prolonged interest in research subjects, even many years after physically leaving the setting. Letkemann (1980, p. 300), for instance, indicates that even 10 years after exiting the field, and more than 800 miles away from the site, he continued to stay informed about the welfare of his subjects.

Because of the uniqueness of every field situation, there are different nuances to exiting. Ethnographers, however, must always be mindful that the time will come to leave—at least physically. Toward this end, researchers must prepare both the community members and themselves for the exit. Perhaps a quick exit will work in some cases (Festinger et al., 1956; Rains, 1971),

whereas a more gradual drifting off may be required in other circumstances (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Unfortunately, these research-related decisions are not easily made.

TRYING IT OUT

As with all research methods, researchers must practice, stumble, and even sometimes fail to accomplish the research project in order to appreciate how ethnographic strategies operate. Several suggestions for brief microethnographic projects follow. As with the practice of interviewing strategies (see Chapter 4), these suggestions are intended as exercises, not actual research projects in themselves.

Suggestion 1. Position yourself in a public location where many people congregate. Shopping malls, bus terminals, and airports are good examples of the sorts of places I mean. Next, simply sit and watch and listen. Construct field notes of the observations and what you heard (do not engage in any conversations or interviews). Repeat this activity for several days. Be certain that you write up full notes after you have left the field each day. Bear in mind that the time you spend in the field geometrically increases when you write up your full notes. Initially, spend no more than 15 or 20 minutes at a time in the field.

Suggestion 2. Go to your school’s library or cafeteria every day at the same time for about a week. Each day, sketch a simple map (a sociogram) of the room. Include any tables, chairs, devices, and people you see each day. At the end of the week, compare the drawings, to see if any changes can be detected.

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